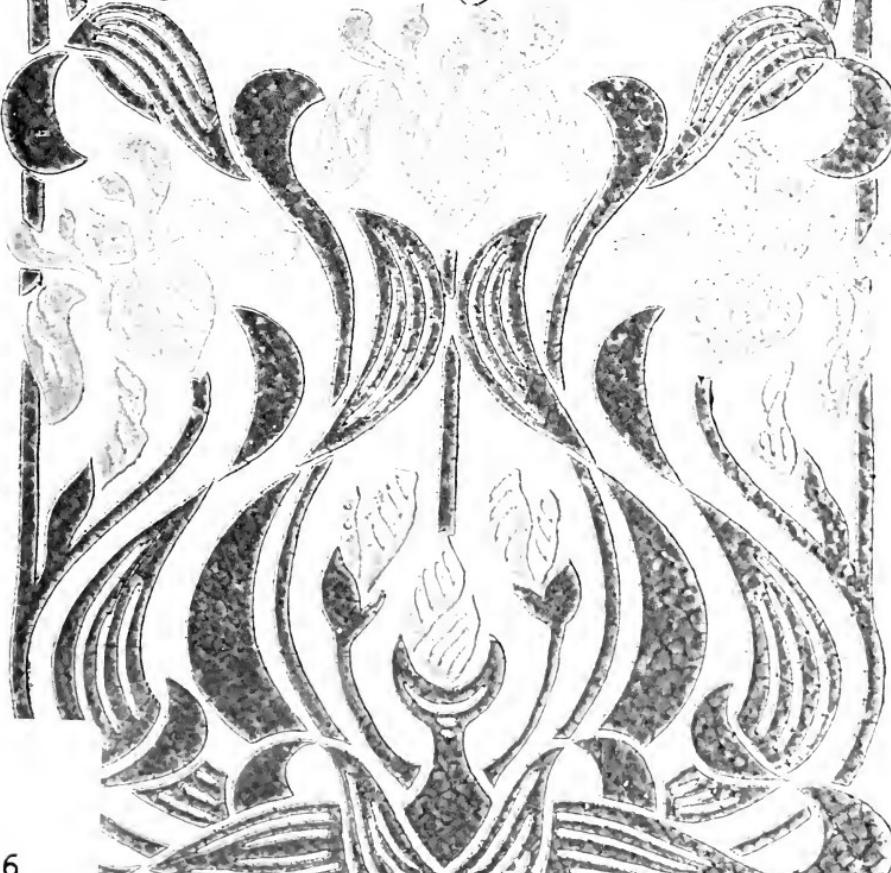


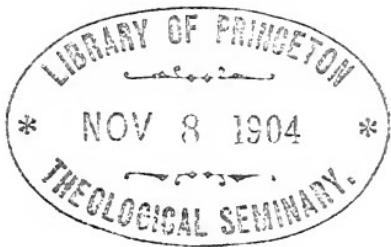
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ECCLESIASTES AND OMAR KHAYYÁM

*A Note for the Spiritual Temper
of our Time*

BY



JOHN FRANKLIN GENUNG

AUTHOR OF "STEVENSON'S ATTITUDE TO LIFE," "THE
PASSING OF SELF," "WHAT A CARPENTER
DID WITH HIS BIBLE"

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ECCLESIASTES AND OMAR KHAYYÁM.

FOR fully two thousand years, in the Book to which the world accords divine honor, has stood before the generations of readers this conclusion, drawn by a Hebrew sage from a wide survey of life:—

“WHEREFORE I PERCEIVE THAT THERE IS NOTHING BETTER THAN THAT A MAN SHOULD REJOICE IN HIS OWN WORKS; FOR THAT IS HIS PORTION: FOR WHO SHALL BRING HIM TO SEE WHAT SHALL BE AFTER HIM ? ”¹

There it is, in plain sight; and yet both verdict and author have waited long for their due. Till within a few years the man who held such a view of life as this would have been called a skeptic. To have rejoiced in anything earthly would have been accounted an affront to Heaven; to have made up one's conduct of life

¹ Ecclesiastes iii. 22, a verse fairly representative of the whole book.

without reference to a future beyond this world would have seemed like awful impiety. To-day, however, as the words come up again, they sound not so mischievous ; somehow, the breath of a wholesome spirit seems to have passed over them. And this is what has taken place. The spirit of a new and saner time is awake, and it is in its vigor that we respond to the old sage's words, hearing in them a congenial note. The conclusion they draw, in fact, is one to which the mind of our age is dimly moving, as to a sterling resting-point of faith. And for this forward movement, with its freightage of good sense and good cheer, we have the skeptics in no slight measure to thank.

What I mean may be seen illustrated in the book which just now is on every centre-table, Omar Khayyám ; a book whose present popularity, after it had lain long years neglected, is a phenomenon to be reckoned with.

In the same vein as the words above quoted, confronting the same problem, proposing a similar though less lofty solution, — yet under its subtle heathenism you find recognized no future beyond the breath or above the eyes, no God more gracious than fate, no occupation

nobler than to drink wine and read verses. That Omar is epicurean and agnostic to the last degree is perfectly true ; he is a straight traverse of what our churches teach. But what good does it do to say so ? The poem is here, a popular pet and fad, to be read and pondered and have its influence. Its power on the age is appointed. No one can stay its course. No one needs to stay it. Like all vital literature it simply finds its own, and harms only those who are more susceptible to virus than to nutriment. Even the Gospel, you remember, may, as St. Paul says, be a savor of death unto death. This poem, though far from being a gospel, has also its fibre of truth, its throb of good sense and vigor, for those who bring a healthy mind to meet it. What we are here concerned to note, however, is this : Omar's undeniable hold on the age is a symptom. It betokens the presence of a spiritual mood or attitude to which his manner of thinking is congenial. And this is true. To a notable extent the mind of our day, whether we want it so or not, is moving in the vein of Omar's thought ; is in fact getting much relief and satisfaction from it. And

I think that when we interpret it by the insight already ours, the insight derived from our century, our ancestry, our Christian heritage, it will be found a vein truly tonic and wholesome.

This is what, with the help of the words above quoted, written long before Omar and long before Christ, I wish now to show. Out of a twilight era of revelation the words come, but from a spirit so sound, so ready for the sunrise, that the two thousand years of diffused day that have intervened since only serve to make their essential truth more evident. Let us see what they contain.

I.

It is in what our sentence from Ecclesiastes sums up, and in the implied denial of revelation with which it concludes, that our enlightened age will find, at first sight, most to censure. “Who shall bring him to see,” asks the sage in utter negation, “what shall be after him?” He has been speculating on future things; tormenting his soul with the same kind of questions that have agitated so many thousands

since. What follows — he has asked — when wise and foolish, nay, when man and beast, lie down together and die, just alike? What gravitation or levitation of spirit follows? Who knows whether it is the animal spirit that goes down and the human spirit that goes up, after all? And what shall become of the wise man's work, — will it be perpetuated by wise, or dissipated by fools? And when and how will these deadly wrongs of earth be righted? Such are some of the problems on which he meditates — problems the like of which are still vital to-day. And from all these inquiries he returns baffled and beaten, with a sense of their utter futility. A profitless occupation, this conjecturing on what is to come; all vanity, vapor, a chase after wind.

Here I say is where, in the pride of our enlightenment, we take issue with Ecclesiastes, and put ourselves on a plane above him. He lived, we urge, in the twilight era, before Christ had brought life and immortality to light; but we have the fuller revelation. His despairing question, then, “Who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?” no longer seems like a futile speculation. Have we not John's vision

in Patmos and Dante's "Divine Comedy" and Milton's "Paradise Lost," — works wherein, by the greatest poetic genius, the glories and woes of the future state lie as it were mapped out before us? It is all, we imagine, a part of our common outfit of knowledge, like the Copernican theory of the universe. What have we to do, then, with calling the Hereafter into question?

Well, I will answer this inquiry by raising another. We have all these definite ideas of an unseen future; for centuries they have been a source of comfort and of dread and of motive; — and now, what do we do with them? What have we done with them? Are these ideas of the future, concrete as they seem, a real revelation to us, from which our soul reaps vigor and achievement, or not?

I won't say no, for I cannot speak for all souls. Nor do I contemplate the unspeakably dreary alternative of giving up our light of immortality, and going back to Ecclesiastes' twilight. Thank God we do not have to. The light that has risen since his day is no wandering fire, but real. But do you know there are many who are still asking his groping questions of the dusk, or else assuming to answer them;

are still on the plane of vague speculation that he discarded. That is what they are doing with their notions of the future. The revelation that has come since he lived, real though it is, has not yielded to them its true import at all.

What I mean may be indicated in the words of one who, having had his day of discredit as a skeptic, is coming gloriously to his own as one of the wise seers of the ages. Emerson, speaking of men's eagerness to know the future by some revealed word, thus puts the case: "Revelation is the disclosure of the soul. The popular notion of a revelation is that it is a telling of fortunes. In past oracles of the soul the understanding seeks to find answers to sensual questions, and undertakes to tell from God how long men shall exist, what their hands shall do and who shall be their company, adding names and dates and places. . . . Men ask concerning the immortality of the soul, the employments of heaven, the state of the sinner, and so forth."

Now these, I say, are essentially twilight questions, survivals of the era before the full light of life shone upon the world. They take the sublime scripture conceptions of immortality

and eternal life, crowded as these are with meaning both future and present, and treat them as if they meant nothing but duration, nothing but continued existence. That seems to be the great point for men to know and to adjust themselves to. If they may only continue to exist beyond the grave, they can, as the phrase is, have some room to turn round in: they can repent, they can take a new start, they can get their due, they can rest, they can see their bad neighbor suffer, and so on. Hosts of things they can do, all more or less remotely related to what they are doing now; give them only continued existence, and sometime, somewhere — away off — existence will have worth and interest. Here are people who cannot dispose of a day; an hour hangs heavy on their hands; and yet, for some reason they want existence to go on; they too seem to be glad there is a prospect of continuance. Why should they want to keep living? Others there are whose sole distinction is that they have lived ninety or a hundred years. We do not count a man's years, until he has nothing else to count. Why should a vacuous existence want to go on counting, indefinitely?

Here we are brought to a point where my inquiry becomes piercing and poignant: What are you doing with your ideas of what is to be?

For it is not merely a question of wealth or emptiness of life; not a question, either, that a speculative answer can rightly settle. The future may be so treated as to be the enemy of the present. Multitudes in their idle conjecturing spirit treat it so, drifting while they dream, and making no preparation for it; like a husbandman who is so rapt on the harvest that he forgets to sow. Nor is this the worst of it. Multitudes there are who, because they take a future existence for granted, and discount its terms, are resolved to have their fling now, and sow to the flesh, trusting at some later time to get their worn-out souls in order and slip into heaven. It isn't heaven they really want, but they must have something, and they will bargain for the least irksome—when it cannot be helped. For all such persons the doctrine of futurity is a snare. They are making it an occasion; degrading it to an evil purpose. Their idea of a post-mortem existence is merely a calculation of chances; it puts off living, or, what is the same thing, induces men to live indirectly.

and insincerely, with their eye not on life itself, but on some commutation of it yet to come. This, I say, is an evil and a snare. Better than this it were, if the heavens were closed, or if a great earthquake of agnosticism should come, to shake the torpor of assurance from our creeds, the sordid commercialism from our lives ; better, with all its ruin of old beliefs, if from a bargain or a postponed dream it should startle life into a present assertion of soul, a present energy of principle, —

“And man stand out again, pale, resolute,
Prepared to die, which means, alive at last.”

I do not say I desire this. I say what is more important: this very catastrophe, if such it be, is close to us. The skeptics are getting in their plea, to which as soon as you get outside the church door you will find men listening. They are saying things that invade men's dreamy fancies of the beyond ; telling the age, in effect, that after all man has not been brought to see what shall be after him. Men's speculations remain about as truly a vanity and a chase after wind as those of Ecclesiastes were to him. And when old Omar Khayyám breaks into our age with a voice like this : —

“Strange, is it not? that of the myriads who
Before us pass’d the door of Darkness through,
Not one returns to tell us of the Road,
Which to discover we must travel too.

“The Revelations of Devout and Learn’d
Who rose before us, and as Prophets burn’d,
Are all but Stories, which, awoke from Sleep,
They told their comrades, and to Sleep return’d,”—

when he plies us with these sweet sad words, we do not know how to gainsay him. The words seem to traverse long-cherished religious doctrines ; and yet they elicit not the shock of horror but a strange thrill of assent. It is with a real sense of relief that we follow their implication and feel ourselves pulled back to earth from our too-adventurous curiosity about things to come. I am not Omar’s advocate : the significant point with me is that he is so alive in the hearts of our time. That means that he is their utterance and mouthpiece ; giving expression to convictions that are already here, surging up to the brink of speech. The old Persian agnostic is simply putting into words coined from his experience our own misgiving that we must not presume too far on a fancied knowledge. After all, we have not found it out ; we

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cannot find it out here; the master-knot of human fate is beyond an earth-dulled wit to untie.

“There was the Door to which I found no Key.
There was the Veil through which I might not see.”

Men are discovering not only how little they can discover, but how much it unnerves them to try; and so the age which a few years ago was in the restless, yearning, uneasy mood of “In Memoriam” has closed that book, and is bathing its spirit in the epicurean sentiment of Omar Khayyám.

Now do not mistake this rising mood of the age. It is not a mood of scoffing and mockery, as of those who cast off the bridle before God and sacred things. That could not be, you may be sure, in a land and people like ours, Bible-saturated as we are, walking in the influence of godly ancestry and righteous traditions, surrounded with a public sentiment quick to rebuke evil and maintain essential good. It is not in the power of one Oriental doubter, or of his clever translator, to sweep a folk like this from their spiritual moorings; no power in earth or air can make us go with Omar one step farther than he meets our convictions. Are

you afraid men of our fibre will swallow Omar whole? Coming in timely to voice a conclusion of ours, he offers also his wine-cup. Do you think he is making drunkards? He takes his crude simulacrum of a God to task for ungod-likeness. Do you think he is making scoffers? Not at all. He is not working on scoffer and drunkard material.

And so with all our response to him we are never moved to deny the *reality* of a future life. It is there, grand, awful, withdrawn; and we lie down at the solemn call, trusting that what is best for us beyond — that, and that surely — will be. But here is a case where to affirm is just as bad as to deny. Our too-idle dreams over an assumed future, our brazen brokerage of its terms, may well teach us that. It is better to go a little slow about such an object of thought. To affirm is to assume that you know all about it; — and are we not rather small men to know so much? Is not a little dose of agnosticism, — enough to reduce our presumption and make us reverent, — a salutary medicine here? Do not let the name scare you; it merely calls upon you not to affirm or assume acquaintance with what you are not large enough to know; its

hint is that you had better wait and grow to it.

This is coming to be a very prevalent attitude of our time toward the unseen future; an attitude that, so far as Omar is equal to it, uses his voice to express it. There is restfulness in it, but not heedlessness; there is also, I think, a note of dignity and noble ideal. Our age is learning to be silent before the close-drawn veil, because it is waiting for a disclosure nobler than can be seen through a hole or telegraphed through a table; a disclosure that shall be a revelation, an unfolding of the soul, rather than a peep-show of an object. To such an event it is not a vanity but a joy to look forward. And with such a conception as this Ecclesiastes' words fully harmonize: "Who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?" No denial here. Give him eyes to see, and it will be visible; as fast as the soul grows revelation opens to it. The great immortal realm is waiting merely for our thews to harden and our spiritual pulse to beat strong enough for its mighty energies. When we are ready, it is ready. The eye sees only what it brings with it the power of seeing. Why then speculate on what,

even if described to us, we could not understand? To-morrow we arrive there, where we are going, and know the country by inhabiting it. And that is the only way we can know it.

II.

But after all, to say we do not know and cannot see is only negative; it brings the age but a little way toward its spiritual adjustment. No joy, no uplift, can come from what we throw away, however glad we are to relinquish it. Something more than the truce to vague speculation is needed, something of positive discovery to account for the grateful sense of revulsion that came in with Omar: something beyond what he can give, though he points the way. And that, I think, is accurately supplied by Ecclesiastes, in the words I quoted at the beginning. “Wherefore I perceive,” he says, “that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion.” This is his “wherefore,” with which he sums up all his quest for the best things of life; he has returned from a wide circuit of inquiry to this.

With him, too, as with our age, this landing-stage of thought represents a revulsion and reaction. He is falling back, with a sense of reaching solid ground, from doubtful speculations that leave everything in air, to what he can see and handle, what calls to him every day and determines the day's activity, what employs head and hand and heart in the concrete endeavor to meet the business that lies nearest. That, obviously, is his portion, his allotment in the order of things. He cannot get rid of it. It was here, at his very feet, all the while he was star-gazing and sight-seeing. It is something not only God's but his own, and of all things in life most his own. With new zest it is, that he returns to it, like those who coming home from a journey feel that they never realized before how good home was. After all his eager excursions to find something more just, or more congenial, or more poetic, or more profitable, there is nothing better, nothing better, than just this ordained life-work, with all its homely potencies of aptitude, and accomplishment, and varied interest, and joy. And to take it with joy, to enlist his enthusiasms in it,—what is this but to build his heaven, his

causeway to the unseen future, out of the materials that lie at his hand?

We are all building heavens: that is, feeding our imagination and stimulating our energies by ideals of what would be to us the crown and consummation of life. Paltry or palatial we build, according to the size of our souls; but not always of permanent materials, and all too seldom of materials close by. Away off somewhere we look for the crown of things, that in which we can rejoice as our rest and final portion; it is beyond the sea, or beyond the grave, or beyond this emergency,—never just where we are. It is Omar's service to our day to have pointed toward the correction of this error. To be sure, he holds before us only the moment, only our momentary taste of being; but of that moment, the only opportunity of which we are sure, he bids us make prompt and sufficing use. That is ours; that while it lasts may be supreme. If we cannot pack our heaven into that, he will promise it nowhere. But more: we *can* get our heaven into the moment of this life, because already — or nowhere — it is in our soul. You recall his truest and most impressive stanza:—

“I sent my Soul through the Invisible,
Some letter of that After-life to spell :
 And by and by my Soul return’d to me,
And answer’d, ‘I myself am Heav’n and Hell.’”

We may call the old Persian hard names if we like — perhaps he deserves them ; — but let us thank him for words not only so true but so scriptural, reminding us that here, in our soul’s resources, is all our heaven-material, and that *now* is the accepted time, now the day of salvation.

Here I think is the inspiring discovery which, aided so largely by the skeptics, our deeply earnest age is making ; the positive attitude and motive to put in the place of its outworn brooding over future things. Make up life not with reference to a vague future, or to a shadowy place somewhere else, but right here, taking what you can rejoice in and wreak your soul’s vigor upon now, and taking as you can hold out. There is a centre of life, a fibre of character, which grows not old with time nor suffers change with place ; its wealth is all available now and within us, whatever the fates have for us outside. Because Omar moves in the consciousness of this, he has found the sane and sturdy heart of our time.

And now, having responded to Omar thus far, earnest present-day souls will leave him. You cannot make them stay with him. When it comes to the question what this newly adjusted life shall centre in, what its permanent tissue shall be, our true answer is not drawn from Omar but from Ecclesiastes. Omar sees nothing better than to have pleasure — or rather to vegetate — in a lazy self-indulgence ; that is his heaven. Ecclesiastes, his wise soul taking note of an active world full of vigorous enterprises, and a God up there guiding it, bids us rejoice, bids us put our energy and enthusiasm, in work.

A rather austere kind of present heaven, you think ? Wait till you have looked at it a minute.

“ To rejoice in his own works.” Work, observe, — not play. That is, put your joy in the steady business of life, the thing that must bring livelihood to you and yours, the thing that your life with its sum of talents and skill and energies stands for ; put your joy in this, not in life’s occasional relaxations. That is your portion — to work, to be a producer. An all-wise Creator has planned it for you, and drawn out the plan in the terms of your best

aptitudes and powers. He has given you energy, ingenuity, inventive skill; has endowed you with a sense of beauty, order, adaptation, art; has set before you great things to do, great problems to solve, great enterprises to accomplish. No man so humble but has some portion in these things. What lines of activity stretch out from the work we are all doing, and what a laborious world this is! So sublime does it look to Ecclesiastes, as he contemplates all the varied energies coöperant in their place and time, that he says God “hath set eternity in their heart.” And now to rejoice in your own share of this work is to let your soul sing as it coöperates with God in building and beautifying His world. Can you think of anything on earth set more truly in the key of eternity than that?

Some there are, you know, whom this will estrange because they have their ideal fixed on a heaven of rest,—by rest meaning that they can stop doing what they are doing now, and take their ease. What they are doing now they somehow seem to be tired of, or ashamed of; at any rate, they long for release from it. They regard it as a strain and a hardship to keep keyed up to their daily occupation. Nothing

but stern necessity keeps them at it here; as they say, if they were rich they would never do another stroke of work. That is, their soul is not in their employment but in their amusement; to this their real self dodges off from everything serious and strenuous. What is most centrally in them, in fact, is to be lazy, and live, or plan to live, a do-nothing life. They are the ones who echo Omar's lines:—

“A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness—
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!”

This is not life, determinate, directed, characterized: this is a kind of picnic, fit for the sick or tired. It may have its place as a medicine; but to make your life go outward and upward in this is as if the chief end of man were not to have character but to have a yacht and a billiard-room and golf links. Think of immortal God-created energies tapered down to this! Ecclesiastes had just returned from trying this sort of thing, on the princeliest scale; and every soul who imitates him will have the same experience and get the same inevitable result that he did — vanity and vexation of spirit.

It is written in the creative decrees of God, and the creative energies of man — you cannot get heaven in a vegetative, self-indulgent life.

“To rejoice in his own works.” Observe again — works, not pay. That is, find your point of rest and supreme interest, in other words your finality, in the works themselves, your own soul’s idiom, not in some more valued equivalent outside and beyond. There is nothing better, is Ecclesiastes’ verdict, than to have something to do that you are proud of, that you would rather do than not, that you would go on doing for the interest of it, even if you did not see wages forthcoming. How little of this there seems to be in men’s lives now — how little that is not for sale! How much that our tyrant civilization, with its eye on colossal output and revenue, compels to be done in a venal, slovenly, shoddy manner, until it becomes a drudgery that men cannot help trying to avoid! We talk about our commercial age, about our mad chase for wealth: the deplorable feature of it is, not the tremendous energy and intelligence that are put into it, but the fact that it is so hollow and heartless — on the one side that the clutch for dollars so seems

to extinguish all care for providing honest money's worth, and on the other that men so loathe the work itself, the real thing,—or else shirk it to the last point that will not endanger their Saturday night's pay. Yes, we say in our haste, men hate work, what they love is only cash. Nay, we go into their churches and are not surprised to hear them singing of heaven,—

“There we receive the blest reward,
The prize will there be given;”

as if religion too were a sort of chromo affair, a grand competition for a medal or a crown;—as if men wanted pay for being real men! And we are half tempted to ask, Is there nothing intrinsic, nothing that money cannot control, left at the centre of things?

Oh, to be sure, here and there an artist there is, whose soul is in his statue or picture, not in the check that buys it; a poet whose prompting to vital song comes from a source beyond the magazine editor; an inventor or scientist whose glowing spirit of research or creation is unquenched by penury. Yes, there may be a saving remnant after all. Why is it so small,

— why is it a remnant? Do you know, my friend, whoever you are, that your work, your contribution to God's sum of things, was meant to be as it were a work of art, a noble poem, a vital creation that it were a profanation to sell, and that no one can buy? Do you know that in your peculiar work is an individuality, a core of personal power and interest that is in no other? This, I think, is what Ecclesiastes means when over against an empty scheming for future gain he sets rejoicing in our own work.

A notable experience has preceded this conclusion of his. In this same commercial spirit he had tried every line of life, to see what profit, what exchangeable net proceeds, he could get; and from all alike, good and bad, came one result — vanity, vapidness, all. When it came to the question of pay, none of them paid. But afterward, as he thought it over, it occurred to him that there *had* been something he had nigh overlooked. His soul had derived joy from his labor; the labor had been its own reward while it was in progress. It occurred to him also that the soul he had put into it, or as he called it “his heart guiding by wisdom,” was, as com-

pared to the lack of it, as light compared with darkness. These afterthoughts of his, which in fact make up the gist of his book, were simply discovering his own intrinsic manhood, his present heaven, in what that royally endowed soul of his could be and do, not in what he could sell it for.

By the side of this experience of Ecclesiastes, it is interesting to set the testimony of a busy, happy, robust man of this century, whose biographer said of him that he never did a thing in his life that he did not like to do — William Morris. “It seems to me,” Morris once said, “that the real way to enjoy life is to accept all its necessary ordinary details and turn them into pleasures by taking interest in them.” “It cannot be too often repeated,” he said later in life, “that the true incentive to useful and happy labor is, and must be, pleasure in the work itself.” An undesigned commentary this, on the words of our Hebrew sage. And is it not true? I do not say it is always easy, or even possible, in our complex industrialism, to rejoice in tending a machine or wielding a pickaxe; but one *can* rejoice in the health and strength, the steadiness of head and hand, that enable him to be one of

the world's producers ; one can find a rejoicing-point in making his soul govern his energy ; and if one can become absorbed in a work which his skill and invention have as it were secreted from his life in the world, we may agree with Ecclesiastes that there is nothing better than the joy one gets out of that.

III.

Such is the great appraisal of life coming to us out of what we are pleased to call the twilight period of the world, that era before the consciousness of immortality, brought and diffused by Christ, threw a new light on life's outcome and goal. I think you are ready to say with me that it does not suffer by the noonday radiance of this later time. Its solidity and beauty but show the more. The Preacher-sage, whoever he was, built his conclusions to last. If in this Christian era of grace and truth nobler ideals of soul are revealed, it simply means nobler works to rejoice in, greater light to follow, riper readiness when the parting hour strikes to enter the veiled existence beyond. There is nothing in this appraisal, then, to be unlearned

or corrected. It has not, to be sure, all the data for the full wealth of godlike character; one whole hemisphere of life, we may say, it leaves out of the account, when it contemplates only getting and not giving, self-perfection and not self-impartation; but in its ideal of righteousness and happy employment it lays a solid foundation for the supplementing half that comes with the Christ ideal. Ecclesiastes finds the noblest achievement that can be made in the twilight hemisphere of life, the highest mountain-peak of readiness to catch the first glory of the sun.

And now to us, with our two milleniums of Messianic light, his words have come; like new words they reach us, made timely as they are by the fascinating stanzas of Omar Khayyám. In the common message of these two Orientals we can well afford to rejoice and take heart; for we have so much to add it to. Do you realize in what environment of light and motive this wave of good cheer comes to you to-day, bidding you drop your uneasy speculations on the future and simply be happy, simply rejoice in your own works? It honors you in its coming, because such are your surrounding influences to guide and restrain, such your Christian soundness of

soul, that you may be trusted to choose your own works. Long has His power led you who brought life and immortality to light. In the life He brought was included the immortality; this had not to assert itself. Christ fed no idle curiosity about unseen states and places. He has done no more than others to tell your fortune. He has simply given you a life to live whose fibre is permanent, immortal, eternal, a life in which you can rejoice always, whatever the world you live in. And when He left you all He needed to say was, “Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.” You know because the impulse and direction of it have been put as a vitalizing power into your soul. That ministry of His has made it forever impossible for you to rejoice in the works of the flesh. His spirit will stir in you and cause you shame and unrest, until you have committed yourself whole-souled to a work that will bear the Christian light in which you walk. Derive all the cheer you may from Omar; but you may be sure that Omar’s lazy rose-garden life can never minister joy to a soul in whom the Christ-spirit has stirred. Our age is in better business than making Persian idlers; and by so much as its educated

ideals are nobler, it can better bear the very agnosticism of which Omar is the exponent. It is a great thing, in these days, to find a worthy source of practical joy, such as no tender conscience or purer ideal can impair, and to identify our whole life's talents and energies with it. Heaven becomes a present possession in such a portion as this.

Nor is it that initial Christ-power alone that you have for impulse. Think, also, of the noble line of saints and heroes, of godly ancestors, of sturdy strenuous historic movements, of soundly laid public sentiment and demands, all accumulating their centuries of incitement and power to make your work great. Why, how much it means just to *live* to-day, — to live a life that need make no apology for itself. To respond to the tremendous energy of spiritual light and motive that rolls in upon your soul, and to adjust your common activities, your allotted portion, to it, — what can you want better, for time or eternity? How can you look away from such riches of resource to some vague future of transformation, or prize-winning, or idle indulgence? “Of immortality,” says Emerson again, “the soul when

well employed is incurious. It is so well that it is sure it will be well. It asks no questions of the Supreme Power.” This is the deep reason why we can, to so great extent, strike hands with Omar, responding to his hearty use of the present moment of being, though we base our joy in work rather than in time-killing, in righteousness rather than in wine.

Here we may leave it. “Immortality will come to such as are fit for it, and he who would be a great soul in future must be a great soul now.” Rejoice, then, all who walk in this latter-day light, that your revelation is an unfolding not of future mysteries but of the true greatness of manhood. Rejoice, too, that in the present lies enfolded the seed of eternity, waiting only your soul’s growth and maturing to burst into the glory of leaf and flower, and to bring forth fruit after its kind.

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